DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 114 079 IR 002 704

AUTHOR Lockwood, James D.
TITLE Employers' Expectations of Recent Library School Graduates: A Review of the Recent Literature.
PUB DATE 19 Aug 75
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Employers; *Employment Qualifications; *Expectation; Job Applicants; Job Market; Job Placement; *Librarians; Library Education; Literature Reviews; Personnel Needs; *Personnel Selection; Professional Personnel

ABSTRACT

In order to discover employers' expectations of recent library school graduates' qualifications, a study was made of the literature between 1970 (when the job slump made it an employers' market) and 1975. The accumulation of journal articles, letters to editors, editorials, ERIC documents, monographs, speeches, and dissertations added up to 150 citations, of which included both survey research and articles of opinion, revealed that: (1) there are usually a number of candidates who qualify for each position; (2) since the initial screening is a most important part of the process, a candidate needs to make himself stand out in a positive way; (3) an applicant must be able to move about not only for jobs, but for interviews as well; and (4) contacts and tips about openings are important. A bibliography is attached. (LS)

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ED114079

EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS OF RECENT LIBRARY SCHOOL GRADUATES; A REVIEW OF THE RECENT LITERATURE

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By: Jim Lockwood

August 19, 1975

IR 002 704

INTRODUCTION

Library school graduates of this decade are met with fewer job opportunities than were graduates of the 1960's. To make job seeking even more difficult for some, the stiffening of requirements for beginning professional positions has also taken place.

The constriction of the job market has been met with pleas from all sources. The employers cry for library schools to curtail enrollments and for students to secure more advanced skills with languages, computers, or subject specialties. The students can now be heard asking employers for the courtesy of prompt responses, and asking library schools to provide them with practical background in addition to theory. Likewise, the library school has its pleas. To the students they say, be aggressive, do not expect all openings to appear in journal advertisements. Some library educators, in addition, feel that it is good that employers must now put some thought into their hiring practices.

All concerned will pretty much agree that it is no longer the first person who walks by, that gets the job. A selection process actually takes place. This paper seeks to illuminate one part of that process: What it is that employers expect of beginning professionals.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature since the employment crunch. In doing so we can attempt to extract the particular expectations expressed in that literature. That is to say, what characteristics or attributes are noted as important, and which are either neglected or appear to be unimportant?

BACKGROUND

When did the tide turn? Apparently it did not turn at the same time for everyone. The journal literature of 1970 was mixed. While items appearing in Library Journal were questioning the notion of a shortage of librarians ("Death of Manpower Shortage," 1970 and Wimble, 1970), there were still hints that the word had not completely gotten around. For instance, one of the later manpower shortage articles, entitled "Recruiting for Texas Public Libraries," appeared in the Summer 1970 issue of the Texas Library Journal (Walters, 1970). It is doubtful that the public libraries in Texas are still experiencing the problems in recruiting that they once were.

By 1971 the change in the job market had pretty well made the rounds. Since that time the market has been in the hands of the employers. Thus, we sill seek to determine the expectations employers have of recent graduates, now that it is an employers' market.

Various approaches to this question are possible. Most obviously, there is the option of sample survey questionnaires. Those in the position of hiring professionals for beginning positions could conceivably be queried as to how they ranked various applicant characteristics. Four distinct versions of the survey approach have been attempted (Brooks, 1974; Estabrook, 1973; Thomas, 1973; and Wilkinson, 1974). The results of these studies are discussed below.

Another possible approach is that of concentrating on advertisements in journals. This presents several problems. First, it seems that employers are often reluctant to advertise

openings, for fear that they will be inundated with applications. Additionally, the current concern over discrimination has led to the posting of many positions that may have all but been filled. Some persons would go so far as to say that the descriptions were written to match specific candidates for the position. Thus, there arises not only a question of the representativeness of the positions posted, but also the representativeness of the requirements stated for those which, in fact, are posted. Nonetheless, Morris (Morris, 1974) did report on a study of advertisements that appeared over a 21 year period. Frame (Frame, 1972) also has reported on a study of salaries and vacancies as reflected in journal advertisements.

A third approach, and that which this study is based upon, involves a review of the relevant literature over a specified period of time. This approach, for the most part, consists of identfying all possible sources in the realm of journal literature, monographs, ERIC documents, and doctoral dissertations. The next step is the implementation of a scheme whereby one may fairly report on the contents of the relevant body of literature. Finally, then, some general conclusions may be arrived at.

The next section of the paper will deal with the selection of relevant literature, the first step in this approach.

METHOD OF IDENTIFYING SOURCES

The first aid in the selection of journal material was that of Library Literature. This was consulted for the years 1970 through June 1975. See Appendix I for a list of the subject headings consulted in the search.

Additional journal citations were sought from Library and Information Science Abstracts (1972-February 1975), and Information Science Abstracts (1973-74), but few additional citations were found.

To make certain that the journal literature reviewed was reasonably up-to-date, the author scanned all issues dated January 1975, or later, of the more than 50 U.S. and Canadian publications located on the browsing shelves of the Library Science Library.

The Social Sciences Citation Index was consulted for later citations to a few of the most important articles.

Monographic literature, in addition to being listed in Library Literature was sought via the Library Science Library card catalog. See AppendixII for a list of the subject headings searched.

ERIC documents were also sought. The subject indexes were checked for the years 1972 through April 1975. Descriptors used were: "Librarians" and "Library Education."

Relevant dissertations in the field were approached through use of two sources, the Comprehensive Dissertation Index and Schlacter and Thomison's Library Science Dissertations, 1925-1972; an annotated bibliography.

EXTRACTION OF INFORMATION FROM SOURCES

At various points in the process, it was found, certain limitations as to the scope of the study, were necessary. To avoid undue complication, the literature was limited to that concerning libraries in the U.S. and Canada. Further, due to the special certification and curriculum distinctions of school librarianship, that field, it is thought by the author, is deserving of a study of its own.

It is also important to note that, at no time do we actually study the characteristics of the graduates whom are the "chosen" ones. Rather, we are relying heavily on the stated expectations of employers and others who claim to be in a position to know their expectations (e.g. placement officers, etc.).

The steps outlined above, and in the preceding section, led to the accumulation of over 150 citations, including journal articles, letters to editors, editorials, ERIC documents, monographs, texts of speechs, and two doctoral dissertations.

Having over 150 potential sources, the task became one of selecting those items dealing with our topic in substantive terms. Numerous letters, articles, and other portions of the literature document hard times. The real question, that of what library administrators are looking for, escapes many of them.

A total of 14 citations (less than 10%) proved helpful. Less than half of these are specifically directed toward recent graduates, but the others might just as well be, for they are aimed at all job aspirants in the field.

Of the 14 (see the items in the bibliography flagged by an

asterisk), exactly one half (7) base their opinions on some form of objective data collection (in these cases they are based upon questionnaire and interview responses). The remaining seven were comments based upon the subjective opinions of the authors and their colleagues, without the aid of formal survey data. It should be noted that only the latest (July, 1974) of the Frarey and Learmont articles is being considered, as it is thought that this best represents recent trends.

The characteristics and content of each article were coded. This included the date of the article, position of the author, type of library, size of library, and so forth. In addition, the articles were coded for mention of any of 32 specific characteristics that might be desired by employers. These characteristics ranged from the mobility of the applicant to whether the applicant was recommended by a friend of the employer.

CONTENT OF THE LITERATURE

Due to the fact that half of the relevant articles are speaking solely for the author and his colleagues, it would seem unfair to give their contents equal weight with those representing, possibly, hundreds of opinions. For this reason, the seven articles employing some method of objective data collection will be reviewed independently of those expressing the opinions of a few.

LITERATURE BASED UPON SURVEY RESEARCH

Of the seven articles based upon some form of survey technique, three offer distinct contributions which merit individual

attention (Brooks, 1974; Estabrook, 1973; and Thomas, 1973). This is because these articles report on the results of surveys of those who actually play a key role in the selection of beginning professionals. Of these, the latter two are highly recommended as the two key articles on the subject.

The first of these articles (Brooks, 1974) is a report of a study which involved interviews with 25 employers in Oregon and Washington. The employers represented seven public libraries, six academic libraries of varying sizes, four community college libraries, and eight special libraries. Brooks found that the two types of courses most often required were reference and bibliography along with cataloging and classification.

Of particular interest to present students is the fact that 21 of 23 respondents on the question of grade-point average "indicated only moderate consideration of grade-point average" in hiring. Brooks also found that the fact that the applicant's degree was from an accredited school was more important than the particular school it was from.

One consistent pattern which distinguished academic and community college libraries from public libraries, was their view of participation in library school activities. Brooks found that,

> "Participation in library school activities suggests that the candidate will be willing to interact positively with both library staff and faculty."

In other words, professional librarians in the field of higher education are expected to fulfill their responsibilities as persons of faculty rank. Public library respondents gave little

weight to such participation.

The second article (Estabrook, 1973) provides a wealth of information on hiring practices in 144 large public and academic libraries throughout the United States. Estabrook states plainly that,

> "Of greatest concern to employers seems to be the applicant's potential to work effectively with both staff and public."

On the matter of grades it was found that while 68% of the respondents found them to be of some importance, 70% responded "No" when asked if grades proved to be an accurate predictor of professional ability! Responses to further questions indicated that a list of courses was really what was sought when asking for transcripts.

Of particular interest to placement officers and students is the employers evaluation of a recommendation's reliability.

> References from professional colleagues of the employer were seen as reliable by 97% of the respondents.
>
> References from the applicant's former supervisors (library and non-library) were seen as reliable by 93.5% of the respondents.
>
> Next came references from the applicant's former library school instructors, with 84.5% of the employers seeing these as reliable.
>
> Only 60% viewed references from instructors outside the library school as reliable.

By combining the percentages presented in the Estabrook article, we can arrive at a simple rank order of the factors considered in the selection process: (see next page)

		Percent rating as important or highly important.
1.	Personal interview	98%
2.	Suggestions from professional colleagues	93%
Tied 3.	Previous work experience	87%
Tied 3.	Appearance (dress, grooming)	87%
4.	Written recommendations	84%
5.	Grades achieved in library school	68%
6.	Advanced study or degree in another field	66.5%
7.	Self-initiated telephone recommendations	60%
8.	Foreign language facility	52.5%

The first article considered in detail (Brooks, 1974) sampled opinions from a specific geographic locale. Estabrook, however, queried large public and academic libraries throughout the United States. The third and final article of which we will be reviewing the conclusions in-depth (Thomas, 1973), is based upon the results of a survey of 70 libraries serving private liberal arts colleges. These libraries have between three and nine librarians each.

One of the findings of current relevance in the Thomas article, is that over half of the 70 respondents rated the unsolicited letter or application as either effective or very effective in providing qualified job candidates.

Also of current interest is the finding that 27% of those surveyed did not advertise their vacant positions! It is quite likely that such figures might be at least as high today, due to the common fear of having to respond to a multitude of applicants

resulting from a nationally circulated announcement.

As Estabrook had found, Thomas also presents evidence that references may make a difference. Fully 77% responded that they encouraged present employees to solicit applications from qualified friends. Even stronger was the response (86%) in favor of asking librarians at other institutions to suggest candidates. Thus, Estabrook and Thomas, both provide data which indicate that employers respect the recommendations of their colleagues, and thereby afford them due consideration.

To briefly touch upon some of the results of the remaining four articles employing means of objective measurement, we will simply devote one paragraph to the method and focus of each article.

The most popular of the four is the latest of the Frarey and Learmont (Rarey, 1974) annual reports on library school placements. It is interesting to note that this article proved to be one of the more optimistic, in simply reminding the graduate to retain flexibility and mobility when job hunting.

The Wilkinson article (Wildinson, 1974) is a report on the results of a survey of public, special, college, independent research, and university libraries, all in metropolitan areas. The major finding was that metropolitan library service was seen to be requiring librarians with subject and language skills, accompanied by ability in dealing with the public and with non-print materials.

Plotz, reporting, in letter to the editor of the Medical Library Association's Bulletin (Plotz, 1972), found that medical

school libraries were still not requiring librarians with certification. Plotz found that less than 10% required certification at that time.

Finally, in a survey of a large number of academic libraries, many of which were in Ohio, Jackson (Jackson, 1973) found certain foreign languages to be in higher demand than others. In rank order, the five most desired were: German, French, Spanish, Russian, and Italian.

LITERATURE NOT BASED UPON OBJECTIVE DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Of the seven opinion articles, three are written by job hunters (Mc Donald, 1973; Stancil, 1973; and Whittier, 1975), three by library administrators (Farkas, 1972; Travis, 1972; and Wesley, 1972), and one by the head of the Rutgers University Library School placement service (Myers, 1973).

The interview preparation and performance aspect was the most common subject of these seven writers. It seems that both the applicants and the employers stress the importance of the applicant's awareness as to how that particular library has something of importance (beyond a paycheck) to him, and how he has something of importance for the library. It comes out consistently that applicants who merely apply, without taking the trouble to write an individualized cover letter, and without making any other effort to show the employer how they each have something special to offer the other, will simply not stand out in the crowd of applicants.

Second only to the applicant's interview preparation and performance was concern over the resume. It seems as though administrators are easily insulted by resumes that are out of date, of poor quality, and poorly organized. The resume is seen as a sign of the quality of one's work. To the extent that it is given careful attention, the employer at least is aware that the applicant is concerned with his performance. The three articles of greatest help to the resume writer are those by Farkas, Myers, and McDonald.

The only other concern generally expressed throughout the seven articles was that of "contacts." It seems that the applicant can go one step beyond the resume and present himself. This is most often done through the introduction by a friend, to an employer. Commonly, this so-called "old-boy network," will at least get the applicant an interview. More on this later!

For those whose friends cannot seem to introduce them to the right people, there is always the persistent approach of knocking on doors. For a heartening view of some of the finer points of this approach see Stancil, 1973. This is a report on what one graduate learned from visiting over sixty libraries while job hunting.

Most apparent in the literature reviewed herein is the striking absence of any mention of the particular skills desired, by type of library, size of library, etc.. One article (Whittier, 1975) touches upon these specifics in remarking that employers want more than librarians. They want computer specialists, per-

sons with in-depth subject backgrounds, and so forth. In addition, one administrator (Travis, 1972) simply called for graduates with practical experience. No particular area of the field, just experience!

It is the emphasis on "selling yourself" that stands out through both the survey results as well as in the opinions of these individuals. The conclusion, below, will attempt to draw some of these recommendation together and point out just exactly what these mean to the recent graduate.

Conclusion

The literature has failed to provide us with a neat list of qualifications for each type and size of library. It has, instead, pointed out that employee selection is a process. It is this process which the recent graduate must understand if he is gining to expect success in seeking a promising position.

With a great number of applicants for any given position it is quite likely that a number of candidates will meet the qualifications for the position. This is even more true for advertised vacancies.

The important thing for the applicant to be aware of, then, is that the selection process begins with an initial screening of applicants. It is, in fact, this segment of the process that nearly every article cited has dealt with! We have not been discussing the characteristics of those selected for the position. Rather, we have dealt almost entirely with those selected for an

interview only.

Whenever there is a great number of qualified applicants, the first step becomes one of making yourself stand out in a positive manner. The graduate who fails to do this will have few chances to interview, therefore even fewer chances at being selected.

A few years ago the term "mobility" held a great deal of weight in placement circles. As Estabrook wrote: "Most immediately apparent is that libraries no longer 'hire by mail...." This is even more true today. It might be said that in many cases libraries will not even invite interviewees by mail. It is no longer sufficient to be mobile enough to accept a job. It is becoming necessary, in many instances, to announce your arrival in town and ask for an interview. Thus, mobility is important earlier on in the process.

What are some other possibilities for making yourself "available?" One such method, as alluded to earlier, is making use of the "old-boy network." There are two aspects of this network. Each operates at a different stage of the selection process.

First, there is the instance of the recent graduate needing only a lead on a job. That is, he needs to know where unadvertised openings exist. Convention goers, as well as other friends "in the know," are often able to relay announcements of job vacancies.

Secondly, there is the more advanced "tip," usually from a better known friend. This is the introduction leading beyond the awareness of vacancies to consideration for an interview.

Recent graduates often scoff at such methods of job hunting, but once again it is important to remind ourselves of the selection process. The tip on a recent job opening is not a "free" job. Neither is the introduction to employers. These are actually no more than facilitators. They make you stand out enough to be considered, and little more. As the survey data indicated, employers find recommendations from colleagues more reliable. It is only understandable, when one realizes that this procedure increases the probability of their finding suitable job candidates.

Our having reached the time for more aggressive job hunting brings to mind another route for presenting oneself to potential employers. One of the more obvious is to turn the coin around and display oneself in a "positions wanted" advertisement. Just how effective is this? According to Morris (Morris, 1973), it is not very effective at all. To greatly oversimplify Morris' results, we can say that of those people placing such advertisements in American Libraries between November 1970 and November 1972, he was unable to confirm that even one of them accepted a position as a result of having placed the ad.

The literature cited in the bibliography is full of additional approachs and possibilities in pursuing your first professional position. The successful applicant is likely to be one who is fully aware that he must first learn the sources which can inform him of job vacancies. Secondly, he must also be aware of the variety of means by which he can make himself stand out as a candidate.

Finally, it is of necessity that the applicant be cognizant of the fact that even though he has passed through the first two stages of the selection process, he must then convince the employer that both the library and himself has something to gain from their offering him a position.

In summary, then, we can say that the literature was of little help in outlining specific competencies desired of beginning professionals. Most probably, some of everything is desired at one library or another. Rather, the key to being considered for a job lies in the applicant's ability to present him or herself in a positive fashion.

It is always an advantage to be introduced by a colleague, but other means still appear promising. A well constructed cover letter along with a clearly laid-out resume are a must. As has been pointed out, one can resort to selecting specific libraries of interest and letting them know that you will be available for an interview on certain dates.

There is room for much imagination in the pursuit of professional positions. The onus is on the graduate. Mobility and flexibility are not important only in deciding which position to accept. Today, mobility and flexibility are important in, first, finding vacancies, and then, getting interviews. Only then will the applicant's mobility and flexibility be important in accepting a position.

It is this mobility and flexibility, at each point in the process, that employers expect of graduates. Only then will the graduate's specific skills have the chance to be considered.

APPENDIX I

Subject headings consulted in 1970 - June 1975 issues of Library Literature.

1. Applications for positions.
2. Discrimination in employment (heading not used until 1972).
3. Librarians - Supply and Demand.
4. Librarianship as a profession.
5. Library of Congress - Staff.
6. Library schools - Theses.
7. Personnel - Qualifications and Selection.
8. Personnel - Supply and Demand.
9. Placement.

APPENDIX II

Subject headings checked in Library Science Library card catalog.

1. Applications for positions.
2. Librarians - Recruiting.
3. Libraries - Personnel Administration.
4. Library personnel administration.
5. Library science - Vocational Guidance.
6. Library science as a profession.

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